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# Ex-CIA agent says he won't forget Vietnam

By SHIRLEE IDEN

There's a "gone with the wind" syndrome at work in the United States that Frank Snapp doesn't like at all.

"When it comes to Vietnam, we'd like to think it happened 100 years ago," he said.

"The problem with that is, if we do forget, we might do it again. We almost did in Angola and I believe we'd be deeply involved there today if it weren't for the lessons of Vietnam."

For Snapp, an ex-CIA agent, the author of a book on the American evacuation of Saigon called "Decent Interval" and the subject of a long interview in the May edition of Penthouse magazine, his own experience there and subsequent events have made it impossible to forget.

A trim, youthful man, neatly dressed in a dark brown suit and striped shirt, Snapp told how he served almost five years in Vietnam as an officer of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). He was the agency's chief strategic analyst in the Saigon section. Following his two tours there, the CIA gave him their Medal of Merit for his performance.

He was born in Charlotte, N.C., son of a former Marine who is now a superior court judge. He worked in radio and on newspapers and graduated from Columbia University. He earned a master's degree in international relations there.

"WHEN I was about to graduate in 1968, one of my professors recruited me for the CIA," he said. "I hadn't known he was an agent but he'd been watching me. One of the reasons he gave for joining was to avoid the draft."

Snapp thus joined the CIA to avoid going to Vietnam and ended by serving almost five years there. He was in Saigon when the end came on April 29, 1975 and he was one of the last Americans to leave.

"I was hauled off the roof of the embassy onto a helicopter and shot at all the way up," he recalled.

Snapp said the government, particularly Henry Kissinger, had "impeccable intelligence" that the communists would move into Saigon in force and there would be no negotiated settlement.

"Yet Kissinger and the government turned their backs on that intelligence and it was tragic. They forgot to plan for the evacuation of our friends and ultimately, the leave-taking became a free-for-all," he said.

Snapp estimates that 30,000 Vietnamese had been trained by U.S. agencies including the CIA and they were just cut off and massacred by the incoming communist armies.

"Some young embassy officers and others mounted their own evacuation using cargo planes and they got thousands of people out," he said. "130,000 were finally evacuated but the embassy was only responsible for about half of those saved. The U.S. government never admits this."

MANY OF those who were not saved were people Snapp knew well. And even today he explains: "Over 100,000 boat people are afloat on the ocean trying to find a country to take them in or crammed into hellholes called 'refugee camps' in Thailand. Congress should liberalize the immigration restrictions."

He said the administration has just made a statement which he endorses which will admit 25,000 boat people and other refugees into this country each year.

"We owe them this and they should be helped."

The anguish of the evacuation and its tragic overtones moved Snapp to write "Decent Interval," but other incidents following compelled him to write it.

In his opinion, these incidents added up to a concerted, calculated cover-up of the true facts of the evacuation. He said he saw top ranking CIA officials begin to leak their own versions of the pullout.

Six months after he returned to this country, in January 1976, Snapp resigned from the CIA. He had decided to become a whistle blower.

The writing and emergence of "Decent Interval" (published in November 1977) was as secretive as any CIA undertaking. The publisher (Random House) went to great efforts to insure no leaks; there was no advance publicity and book reviewers got their copies about the same time the CIA bought its copies.

SNEPP'S publisher moved secretly with the book because of being burned before. They dealt with the CIA when publishing Victor Marchetti's book, "The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence." The agency managed to delay its publication for more than two years and imposed their right to alter the text. Legal costs alone were nearly \$150,000 to Random House.

The secrecy surrounding the evolution of Snapp's book is the only secret thing about it, he says.

"I didn't reveal any classified information and I haven't been accused of this," he said.

Nevertheless, he is accused of breach of contract with the Justice Department, which has filed suit against him. Random House has been subpoenaed.

Snapp is accused of having breached the secrecy agreement that every agent signs on joining the CIA.

"When I resolved to write my book, I decided not to clear it with the agency. I felt the CIA had forfeited their right to review it," he said. "There aren't any secrets in it and I went through channels while still a member of the CIA. I wanted to do an after-action report, but it was squelched."

Snapp said the most ominous part of the legal moves against him is that the government wants to charge him with a breach of fiduciary obligation.

"This is a common law concept of the obligation of a servant to his master," he said.